

How Black was Black Magic:
An Exploration of Accused Slaves during the Salem Witchcraft Crisis

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The way that slaves were identified in their daily lives in Essex County was reflected in the way they were perceived in courts as accused witches. Slaves commonly lived a life in the background, due to the nature of their duties and expected behavior. Slaves were supposed to be invisible, but when they were identified it was by their race, evidenced by the way they were named. However, slaves were not only isolated from society by their race¹, they were also different in the way they spoke, their lack of family, and their connections to foreign religions. While in court, slaves also used the power they had as accused witches to rebel against their owners. These aspects of how they were dissimilar can be seen in court with three slaves, Mary Black, Tituba, and Candy, and how their differences led to how they were treated in court.

Because slaves were black or Indian and had no rights, they were restricted in ways that they could rebel against their masters. For them, the trials were an avenue through which they could adequately vent their anger. This is evidenced by the case of Candy, a slave originally from Barbados residing in Salem Town with her owner, Mistress Hawkes. When questioned, Candy revealed to the courts that it was her white mistress, Mrs. Margaret Hawkes, who had taught her witchcraft. After being asked if her mistress made her into a witch, Candy replied, “Yes, in this country Mistress give Candy witch.”² Furthermore, as if to assure the arrest of her mistress, Candy went on to detail how Hawkes made her into a witch by bringing up the “devil’s book,” a book that people signed when they made a pact with the devil. In her description, Candy stated “Mistress bring book and pen and ink, make Candy write in it,” further drawing a

¹ Though Tituba was Native American, and not black, she was commonly referred to in the same way as her fellow black slaves were.

² Bernard Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem Witch Hunt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 464. ‘Hereafter abbreviated as RSWH.’

comparison between her mistress and the devil.³ Though the records of the examination are no longer extant, this accusation brought Margaret Hawkes to her examination, though she would be later released from prison.⁴ The accused slaves found in the courts a reprieve from the invisibility they constantly endured, even more so than the afflicted girls. While they were testifying, the slaves could say things and finally be heard.

Tituba was another example of how slaves could rebel through the court. Tituba was Samuel Parris' slave and was one of the first witches accused during the trials.⁵ During her examination, Tituba hinted at five witches when she said, "ther was.5. of them w'th the man."⁶ However, Tituba then went onto to accuse only two people, Sarah Good and Sarah Osburne. In omitting a couple of names, Tituba maintained some control over the court. From then on people would wonder exactly what information Tituba had decided to keep to herself and who among them was an undiscovered witch.⁷ Furthermore, Tituba also stated that nine people in Salem had made a pact with Satan, though she refused to name exactly who.⁸ Because Tituba said there were nine people who had signed the pact, but named none, she further motivated the trials and Salem's hunt for the remaining sinners.⁹ In another effort to rebel against white authority, Tituba described the devil as a tall white-haired man from Boston, thus effectively arousing fears that Samuel Parris or any white men of the village might have had, since the description applied to him.¹⁰ Robert Calef, though he was a critic of the trials and therefore not entirely reliable, revealed that Tituba was forced to testify by being beaten by Parris, which further demonstrates

³ RSWH, 464.

⁴ Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare* (New York, Alfred A Knopf, 2002), 229.

⁵ Samuel Parris was the Salem Village Minister; Larry Gragg, *A Quest For Security: The Life of Samuel Parris, 1653-1720* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 113-114.

⁶ RSWH, 128.

⁷ Peter Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 117.

⁸ RSWH, 128.

⁹ Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York: George Braziller, 1969), 65-66.

¹⁰ Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples*, 131; Gragg, *A Quest for Security*, 137.

Tituba's motivation during her confession.¹¹ This revelation also further complicated the relationship between master and slave. As aforementioned in the 17th century, there existed very few ways for a slave to rebel against a master. However, the witchcraft trials provided a place for the minority to express their grievances in ways that they could not anywhere else.

The elementary use of English further distanced the slaves from the "norm" of Puritan society and reminded anyone in court of their different ancestry, affecting Candy in particular. When asked if she was a witch, Candy replied, "Candy no witch in her country. Candy 's mother no witch. Candy no witch, Barbados."¹² Throughout her testimony, Candy barely used any prepositions, verbs or any articles, making clear to the jury her standing in society and lack of education.¹³ In stark contrast to Candy, Tituba seemed to use clearer diction. For example when asked if she saw the devil, she answered, "the devil came to me and bid me serve him."¹⁴ Mary Black had also adapted a more proper use of the English language, when asked if she hurt the children she replied, "I did not hurt them."¹⁵

One possible explanation of Candy's weaker grasp of English was because of her possible recent enslavement and departure from Africa.¹⁶ Mary Black's master was Nathaniel Putnam, while Tituba's master was Samuel Parris. Effectively, both Mary Black and Tituba were fully immersed in the English language, while Candy remained with her mistress, who was from Barbados. Though no court records indicate the exact date of Mary Black's arrival, it can be inferred that Tituba had been in America for the longest since she presumably came over with

¹¹ Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible world* ([Salem, Mass.] : Printed in London in the year 1700. Re-printed in Salem, Massachusetts, 1796 [i.e. 1797], by William Carlton. Sold at Cushing & Carlton's Book-Store, at the Bible and Heart, Essex-Street., [1797], 343.

¹² RSWH 464.

¹³ Elaine Breslaw, *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 162.

¹⁴ RSWH 128.

¹⁵ RSWH 206.

¹⁶ RSWH 451

Samuel Parris from Barbados around 1680.¹⁷ Because of her use of language, Candy persistently reminded anyone listening of the fact that she was a foreigner, and therefore not accustomed to the same practices and laws as others.

As well as their skin color and their use of language, the way the slaves were addressed reminded others of their social status. In the court documents, Tituba was never called anything other than an Indian.¹⁸ In every account of Tituba, the fact that she was an Indian is often repeated; for instance John Hale referred to her as “the Indian woman, named Tituba.” as did Robert Calef.¹⁹ Deodat Lawson referred to her as “Mr. Parris’ Indian Woman.”²⁰ Never was Tituba’s identity separate from her race. The same can be said of Mary Black, her examination was introduced by her name and then in parentheses it said “a negroe.”²¹ Candy’s case also proves similar. In both indictments against Candy it is specified that she is “a negro woman servant of Margaret Hawkes of Salem.”²² The identities of the slaves inside and outside of the court were tied to their slave status in the village. Their racial identification served as a way to objectify the slaves, so that throughout the court proceedings they were depicted solely in terms of their race. Furthermore, it can be inferred that perhaps their racial identities were conflated to the point of serving as their names. Mary Black’s race was already stated in her name, as was Tituba’s when she was called Tituba Indian, and Candy was sometimes called “Candy Negro.”²³ It was common practice for slaves to not be given surnames, and these three were examples of

¹⁷ Gragg, *A Quest for Security*, 15.

¹⁸ Chadwick Hansen, “The Metamorphosis of Tituba, or Why American Intellectuals Can’t Tell An Indian Witch from a Negro,” *New England Quarterly* 47 (Mar., 1974): 4.

¹⁹ John Hale, *A Modest Inquiry Into the Nature of Witchcraft, and how Persons guilty of that Crime may be convicted, and the means for their discovery discussed, both negatively and affirmatively, according to Scripture and experience* (Boston in N.E., Printed by B. Green and J. Allen, for B. Eliot, 1702), 24; Calef, *More Wonders*, 91.

²⁰ Deodat Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative* (Boston : Printed for Benjamin Harris, and are to be sold at his shop ..., 1692) 162.

²¹ RSWH 206.

²² RSWH 752-753.

²³ RSWH 752-753.

this racist practice. However, for these slaves naming reinforced their “otherness” in the eyes of those listening in court.

Not only did the slaves rebel against their masters, they rebelled against societal norms by being familiar with foreign religions, something that was demonstrated in their use of poppets. During her trial, Candy brought out her poppets and “Mrs. Hawkes and the negro stood by the puppets or rags and pinched them, and then they were afflicted.”²⁴ Further on, the record states that when the poppets were set on fire, the afflicted girls started feeling burning sensations.²⁵ Because Candy had not been in the mainland colonies for very long, her use of the poppets most likely recalled her previous African culture. During her own examination, Mary Black was asked to pin her neck cloth²⁶ and upon doing it “She did so, & severall of the afflicted cryed out they were prick’t. Mary Walcott was prick’t in the arm till the blood came.”²⁷ The use of the poppets or neck cloths by the slaves further enforced stereotypes people held about slaves and foreign culture, despite their prevalence among white witches as well. Lastly, though Tituba did not bring poppets out during her trial, she was associated with other forms of “black” magic, such as crafting a witch cake to cure others of witchcraft.²⁸ Though others were familiar with witch cakes, because Tituba was foreign, it reminded people of this fact. Tituba’s familiarity with “black” magic calls into focus the influence of foreign Caribbean culture prior to her arrival in the Americas. Because of the use of poppets by Mary Black and Candy, something reminiscent of certain Caribbean religions, this reminded the court and judges of their innate “otherness.” Though other accused witches used poppets, because the slaves were black, their

²⁴ RSWH, 464.

²⁵ RSWH, 464.

²⁶ An equivalent to a poppet in terms of an association with “black” magic

²⁷ RSWH, 206.

²⁸ Hale, *Modest Inquiry*, 414; some have argued, though, that the witch cake was made by her husband and not herself.

use of poppets was construed as a sign of “otherness.” When the slaves used poppets they further distanced themselves from their white masters and their norms. Though poppets were a standard to prove an individual’s guilt, none of these accused witches were convicted.²⁹

Though two slaves presented poppets, or variations of them, and two of them confessed to being familiar with witchcraft, none were hanged. The fact that none of the slaves were hanged demonstrated a difference in their treatment by the court and the court’s treatment of other accused witches.³⁰ Mary Black was cleared by proclamation January 11, 1693, while Tituba received an *ignoramus* May 9, 1693, and Candy was found not guilty on two counts January 6th 1693.³¹ Furthermore, the judges might have thought that the slaves were already tainted by their skin color, in addition to their association with the devil, and so that made it seem as though punishment was unnecessary. Or perhaps, the jury thought it unnecessary to persecute the witches because of their race. Any punishments inflicted on the slaves would also harm their masters and mistresses, because they then would have to find a new slave. Because all three confessed, showed some level of familiarity with “black” magic, and talked about the devil’s book, they all met the standards of guilt that developed throughout the trials.

Accusing slaves was comparatively easier than accusing townspeople, because unlike their white counterparts, slaves had no family to defend them, nor did they have any legal rights. Sometimes family members and friends would come to the defense of an accused loved one. However, this was not a possibility for the slaves, because they were completely disconnected from their family. Even though Tituba was married to John Indian, the reasons behind this marriage are unclear. Some suppose that they were forced to marry by Samuel Parris, thus giving

²⁹ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 204.

³⁰ For example, Mary Glover confessed and showed her poppets and was hanged in 1688.

³¹ RSWH 207; RSWH 820; RSWH 752; *ignoramus* signifies a failure to indict by the grand jury.

Tituba a family, but one that would later testify against her.³² Samuel Parris also refused to pay for Tituba's jail fees and therefore she was sold to another master to pay her bonds, effectively removing any idea of family she could have with her master.³³ Tituba's sale removed her as a threat to Salem and also removed her from any sort of slave-community with which she might have been involved. The community of slaves within New England, and Salem in particular, was extremely small, therefore even further minimizing any connection a slave would have to others.³⁴ Not only did their lack of family contribute to their vulnerability, but also so did the fact that the slaves had no legal standing within the community, and could not file any lawsuits for slander on their own.³⁵ Not only were slaves vulnerable to accusations because of their lack of community ties, but they were also handicapped by their lack of character witnesses in court.

The marginalization of slaves in society was demonstrated by the lack of people who spoke against them in court. For instance, Mary Black was cleared by proclamation in 1693 because nobody appeared against her.³⁶ Slaves were so insignificant that even if they presented a threat to society, it was considered too meager to garner any substantive response. In addition, the slaves were supposed to be invisible to society and therefore people did not see them often enough to be able to build a case against them. Before she was accused of witchcraft, Tituba went unnoticed in Salem. Elaine Breslaw stated, "she was already enslaved, had no local tribal connections, was subject to the supervision of an Englishman and, equally as important, was a woman", in other words, Tituba seemed too marginal to be considered a threat to the villagers.³⁷ Because of their relative anonymity, it is surprising that any slaves were accused at all, and

³² Breslaw, *Tituba*, 82. ; John Indian, Tituba's husband, testified against Tituba.

³³ Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1993), 31; Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 292.

³⁴ Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples*, 67-68.

³⁵ Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples*, 100.

³⁶ RSWH 207.

³⁷ Breslaw, *Tituba*, 69.

eventually it seems that the court discovered that they were not worth prosecuting since none of them were actually executed.

Although there were only three slaves accused during the Salem Witchcraft trials, their court records serve as an example of the racist attitudes that permeated Puritan lifestyle. The way the accused slaves spoke English, and the way they were addressed constantly demonstrated their lower social status and non-existent legal status. Because of their marginal lifestyle, slaves were both ideal people to accuse and the least ideal. Because of the nature of their position in society, slaves had no family to defend them, yet because they were so invisible sometimes they had no one to come forward against them. Slaves constantly played with being invisible and being at the forefront of the persecution as in the case of Tituba. Mary Black, Candy and Tituba mixed into their daily lives mythology and religion from their previous homes, and therefore the thing that Puritans identified as witchcraft was not necessarily perceived as witchcraft by the slaves. Because of this conflation of the definition of witchcraft and misunderstanding of English, these three slaves were easier targets than others. The way slaves were treated outside of court thusly affected the way they acted, and were treated and perceived in court.

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